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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANJUL 000574

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DAKAR PLS PASS DAO, ODC, AND RAO

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/15/2016
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PREF](#) [MOPS](#) [PINS](#) [SG](#) [GA](#)
SUBJECT: THE GAMBIA: UPDATE ON TIES WITH SENEGAL

REF: A. DAKAR 1789

[1](#)B. BANJUL 451

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOSEPH STAFFORD, REASON 1.4 (B AND D)

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) In September 15 discussion, Senegalese Ambassador Fall cited the improved tenor in Senegalese/Gambian ties in recent months, expressed certainty that Gambian President Jammeh would win re-election September 22 by a comfortable margin, and knocked down rumors of close ties between Senegalese President Wade and Gambian oppositionists. Fall turned downbeat in discussing the Casamance, asserting that, inter alia, the GOTG was permitting dissident MFDC figure Sadio and his forces to move freely in The Gambia. Fall mentioned his consultations with the GOTG on the influx of refugees here resulting from fighting in the Casamance. He thought that the "next few months" would witness progress on two currently stalled Senegalese/Gambian projects -- construction of the Gambia River bridge and establishment of the Joint Permanent Secretariat. The improved tenor in bilateral ties may prove

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to be short-lived in view of the GOTG's reported mischief-making in the Casamance. END SUMMARY.

IMPROVED TENOR IN BILATERAL TIES

[1](#)2. (C) In September 15 conversation with Ambassador, Senegalese Ambassador Mamadou Fall said the improved tenor in Senegalese/Gambian ties in recent months was continuing (Refs A and B). He asserted that both Senegalese President Wade and Gambian counterpart Jammeh were careful to keep thorny issues submerged -- e.g., presence of radical Gambian dissidents in Senegal and Gambian meddling in the Casamance. Fall expressed satisfaction that, in the three months since taking up his posting to Banjul, he had established good contacts among senior GOTG officials.

GAMBIAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

[1](#)3. (C) Asked for his take on the upcoming Presidential election here September 22, Fall expressed certainty that Jammeh would win re-election by a comfortable margin, citing divisions within the opposition as a key factor. (NOTE: We concur in Fall's assessment, as do our contacts generally. END NOTE) Fall agreed that while Jammeh's Jolla tribe was small, he could count on its total support in the balloting. Fall thought there was some validity to opposition allegations that the governing APRC party had fraudulently arranged for Senegalese -- including Jollas in the Casamance -- to be registered as Gambian voters so as to pad the vote

for Jammeh. Fall added, however, that he had no idea how many Senegalese had been fraudulently issued voter cards and that, in any event, Jammeh's greater support among Gambian voters relative to the opposition candidates was such that he was assured victory regardless of the irregularities in the voter registration process. (COMMENT: The number of fraudulent voters registered in recent months is estimated in the tens of thousands; their impact on the election's outcome remains to be seen. END COMMENT)

WADE'S RUMORED TIES TO GAMBIAN OPPOSITIONISTS

¶4. (C) Ambassador noted rumors that Senegalese President Wade retained close ties with Gambian opposition politicians, e.g., former parliamentarian and current Vice Presidential candidate Hamat Bah. Fall replied that President Jammeh himself had raised the matter with him, but that he (Fall) had flatly denied any such contacts. (NOTE: Other sources insist that Wade, while in the opposition, became acquainted with Bah and that the pair remain in contact. END NOTE)

CASAMANCE

¶5. (C) Fall registered concern over the GOTG's posture amidst the recent resurgence of violence in the Casamance, sparked by dissident MFDC leader Salif Sadio. Fall claimed that the GOTG was permitting Sadio and his forces to move freely on Gambian territory, instead of working with the GOS to ferret out and capture them. Fall also lamented the GOTG's ongoing detention of MFDC military leader Magne Dieme, portraying him as committed to the Casamance peace process and supportive of GOS efforts against Sadio's forces. Fall said the GOTG had so far rebuffed, for unknown reasons, GOS requests to release Dieme. Fall confided that Dakar wanted to ratchet up the pressure on Banjul for greater cooperation in ending the

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Casamance violence and capturing Sadio, but that he (Fall) had convinced the GOS leadership to hold off on any such move until after the Presidential contest here, given Jammeh's total focus at present on his re-election. (NOTE: During TDY RSO's September 15 visit to Gambian border areas near the Casamance, residents told him that MFDC fighters were present in these areas, but did not indicate whether they were aligned with Sadio. END NOTE)

¶6. (C) In response to query, Fall said he suspected, but could not confirm, that Sadio's forces were being supplied with weapons from The Gambia; he did not know whether the GOTG itself was involved in any such weapons flow. (NOTE: A reliable journalistic source claimed to us that the GOTG is "likely" providing weapons to Sadio's forces. END NOTE)

¶7. (C) Fall indicated that he was in touch with senior GOTG officials regarding the influx of refugees into The Gambia resulting from the recent clashes in the Casamance between GOS forces and Sadio's fighters. He recounted that, at a September 8 meeting, the Gambian Interior Minister estimated that due to the clashes, the Casamance refugee community in The Gambia had risen to 5,300. (NOTE: The GOTG's estimate is likely based on that of UNHCR, whose current figure is 5,000. END NOTE)

BRIDGE PROJECT, PERMANENT SECRETARIAT

¶8. (C) Ambassador asked about the status of two key bilateral projects -- construction of a bridge across the Gambia river that would facilitate travel between Northern Senegal and the Casamance region and restoration of the Joint Permanent Secretariat to manage bilateral issues. (NOTE: The Joint

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Permanent Secretariat existed prior to the two countries'

experiment with confederation in the 1980's. END NOTE) Fall responded that progress on both dossiers had come to a halt following the failed coup plot here in March, but that the two sides remained keen to implement them. He thought that "the next few months" would witness a joint Senegalese/Gambian approach to potential donors for support on the bridge project and the establishment of the Joint Permanent Secretariat -- headed by a Senegalese and located in Banjul.

COMMENT

19. (C) The improved tenor of Senegalese/Gambian ties may prove to be short-lived, in view of Fall's claims -- which we regard as credible -- of the GOTG's mischief-making in the Casamance. Jammeh may well view such mischief-making as retaliation for Dakar's suspected complicity in the coup plot thwarted here in March and its suspected harboring of the plot's ringleader, former Chief of Defense Staff Col Ndure Cham. Given the prospect of heightened bilateral strains over the Casamance, Fall's prediction of early movement on the Gambia River bridge project and the Joint Permanent Secretariat seems overly optimistic. END COMMENT.

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